



Food dulls your senses. A full belly makes you slow. Even a small amount of wine puts clouds in your eyes and causes you to see butterflies where there are bullets. That's why this ritual makes no sense whatsoever. This entire day is just bizarre. Why would you schedule something so rigorous and challenging the day after the biggest celebration, the most excessive feast of the year? It must have been thought up by some infidel. Or maybe a Canadian.

"Help! Security! Help!"

Bob and weave.... Tuck my chin behind gloved hands.... flash my eyes over the top to draw him out. No? Nothing? Hell, he's not even trying. In fact, he's running away, screaming.

That's the third one already. Maybe I picked the wrong mall?

Well, I hope they're not all going to be like this. Oh sure, I appreciate an easy git, but to think of all the treats I denied myself yesterday in preparation. Ho! You should've seen the table my sister-in-law set! Glazed ham, sweet potatoes, roasted veggies, a sauce the likes of which I've never tasted before; and then she had this spiced drink that – swear to God – was like sipping the best winter day you ever had as a child. But all I could do was peck at the food; gently kiss the cider, because I knew what today would bring.

I had to be lean and hungry.

I had to be ready.

For Boxing Day at the mall.

A crowd has gathered around me now, pointing and muttering: "...for no reason... just walked over and hit... I did call 911... what's with the gloves?..."

I scan their faces. Mostly confusion, some fright, none of them look.... Ah ha! There's one! Hard, grey eyes; tight closed lips; hair pulled back in a fighter's bun and a long scar running the width of her high forehead. I check the ears: no rings, only cauliflower.

And she's wearing a Kirkland's employee apron.

We lock our eyes.

She mouths the words, "No receipt, no return."

It's on.

I tap my gloves and make a beeline towards her. The crowd parts to let me through. She waits, hands hidden under the smock.

When I'm ten feet away, she raises her hands with the flourish of a cheap magician; the apron swinging around like a cape. My boxing gloves are worn, faded red with 'EVERLAST' on the wrists. Hers are onyx and look like wet stones. The right one has

a hammer painted across the knuckles; the left is a lightning bolt. Her wrists read 'THUG' and 'LIFE'.

"Store credit only, eh?" she snarls.

I place the accent. Canadian.

I'm glad I didn't have that second helping of ham.

On the other side of the mall in front of Babbage's, a dismayed boy watched the violence with a sinking heart. He held an ordinary, dull oak box in his hands.

The Kirkland lady jabbed her right at the strange man – BAP BAP BAP – keeping it at his nose. He risked dropping a hand to try a shot, but she slipped and continued to jab with her left – BAP BAP BAP.

The boy looked at his box. Someone had tried to scrape off the stickers; price and store, but he could still plainly see the letters 'sale' and '...irklan...'. The boy sighed. Across the mall, the Kirkland lady seemed to be waning; her jabs came slower and sometimes missed – BAP... BAP ... BAP. Encouraged, the strange man slightly lifted his head. A mistake. The Kirkland lady saw the opening and delivered a right hook that split lips and sent teeth rattling across the walkway.

The strange man wobbled, then fell flat on his face.

The Kirkland lady spat her mouthpiece onto the back of his head. She lifted her arms in triumph and began her victory circle, boldly proclaiming; "Without a receipt, eh?" she hollered, "You'll only get store credit at the sale price!"

The boy tucked the box under his arm and turned to leave. It was a lousy gift, true, but then everything at Kirkland's was full of lousy. He had no receipt, so he couldn't get cash, and what could he trade it for? A corkscrew that looked like a pig's ass? No, exchanging it wouldn't be worth bothering the Kirkland lady.

He'd just have to find some use for it. There is always something you can put in a box.